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Subject: Selfish Morality.

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A Weekly Publication

OR

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.



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SELFISH MORALITY.

I shall speak to you this evening on the subject that is derived from the parable of the Prodigal Son, which I have just read in your hearing, and which is found in the fifteenth chapter of Luke's Gospel.

Although this is often preached from, it seems to me that the whole ground which is covered by it is very seldom looked at. Only half of it is generally employed; and surely, that is worthy of every consideration. It is in every respect one of the most exquisite of the recorded teachings of our Master. And it is fully as admirable a piece of art as as it is a piece of instruction.

If you consider how our Master was surrounded with malignant watching enemies; if you consider that the very truths which it was necessary for him to preach were the truths which they most bitterly hated; if you consider that the mercy of God to all men was in their judgment treason to his peculiar people, and that the allegation of pride and of self-conceit and of hypocrisy against the Pharisees and the Scribes was to the last degree offensive; if you consider that these men were fanatical as well as malignant, and that there was danger, in any hour, that they would burst forth with such rage and fury to destroy the Saviour that it became necessary for him at times to veil his instruction; if, considering these things, you see how his parables were constructed, how they struck the very centre, and yet were presented in such pictorial forms that these men who grated their teeth over them, could not well get hold of them, and were obliged to hear them; if you see how beautiful the parable is, and then see how it smites them under the fifth rib—if you see and consider these things, you cannot but feel that there was masterly execution of plan, and that there was masterly art in so covering large ground of moral truth with few touchings—in the so speaking things that while they were absolutely simple, they were almost omnipotent in their effect. Such a consideration, I think, will not alone raise in our minds admiration of the power of Christ as an artist-worker in form, but will also add to the zest with which we then accept the moral instruction. For, after all, we shall feel more and more, as we study these things, that beautiful as they are, and admirable as they are, in form, it is the least of their excellence; and it is the richness of the interior that abides with us.

There were three characters in this parable. It is aimed, unquestionably, at the Scribes and the Pharisees—the men that supposed they embodied in themselves every excellence that inhered in human nature and showed forth the purity of the temple. They had been keeping God's law, now, for some hundred years or more, with such rigor that they really felt that they had laid God under an obligation. He had said that if they would keep his law perfectly, their lands should be kept from the hands of the enemy; that they should govern themselves, and that they should govern other men as they had been governed. And they really believed that they had taken God at his word, and fulfilled every duty. Nay more, they had gone beyond the letter, and avowed it a moral duty, so that there might be ample margin; so that there should be no mistake. And they came to feel, "There, this is the promise, and we have fulfilled it to the letter, and more than to the letter; and now God is bound to fulfill his part of the covenant." And it was an enigma, it was a profound perplexity to their minds, why it was, with all these promises, that they were trodden under foot of the Romans, and despoiled as they had been. They could not understand that. For they were righteous men—that one thing they knew. There were other things that they were ignorant about; but they knew about this—that they were thoroughly good men. *Admirable* men they were.

Now, it became necessary for every one of them to be slain. It became necessary to strike the sword right home to this conceit in which their very life was bound up. And this parable of the Prodigal Son was aimed at them. That older brother is the Pharisee; and the younger brother is the Gentile—the outside man of the world. And we must bear in mind these two characters, because we have their parallel in our own midst. The Pharisee is not alone of Jewish extraction. There are Anglo-Saxon Pharisees. Just the same state of mind which was represented by the Pharisees of the temple, is still represented by the arrogant moralist and the purist of our own times.

There were, as I have said, these three characters—the sinning, impetuous young man, and the proper and well-behaved elder brother, and the father. They are all of them striking in the way in which they are delineated. The two sons come into mention at the very beginning, and in remarkable contrast. The young man, willful, wayward, apparently without much affection for his parents, at any rate headstrong, bent upon pleasure, demanded that his father should give him his patrimony. The father did so. The young man gathered up all that belonged to him, and went into a far country: and his life there was a life of utter dissipation. The other brother is introduced as a stayer-at-home. And, as we learn in the sequel, he was one who was rigidly obedient to his father. He studied the inter-

est of the place. He took care of the old man, and of all his possessions. He was a respectable citizen. No man could say ought against him. He staid at home and attended to his duty, and his whole duty, while that scapegrace of a younger brother had gone off, taking all the property that he could lay his hands on, had sunk from bad to worse, and had plunged to the bottom; and the last thing heard from him was, that he was reduced to the extremity of feeding swine, and eating their food.

Here are the two brothers—the older and the younger; and the contrast is a sad one. Here is the good older brother, the respectable older brother, staying at home and attending to his duty, an honorable citizen, an obedient son, an excellent man, and a most proper person; and there is that miserable, dissipated, wretched, besotted, young man, drinking, rioting in debauchery, wasting bodily strength, wasting purity of affection, wasting everything, bestializing himself, clear down to the bottom. And who would not want to be the older brother? I would not. I would rather be the younger one. But let us see.

How is the picture of this young man drawn? So that men will be fascinated with his career? No, I think not. Everybody's sympathy goes with him. You cannot help, when you read the parable clear through, being on the side of the young man. And yet, there is nobody in this world who thinks he did a good thing. Everybody feels that he was wicked, and that he was justly punished for his wickedness. Every single step is so drawn that, while your sympathy, in some sense, holds on to him, it is a sympathy that all the time is condemning him. There is an undertone all the while, in your heart, which says, "Well, he is reaping what he sowed. Since he has pursued, and will pursue, such a course, he must receive such punishment." And you condemn him, and punish him in your thoughts, as he goes on from bad to worse.

There is pleasure—that is the first step of a dissipated life. And there is excitement in it. There is a joyous period that belongs to it. Then comes the period of beginning shadows. Then comes some mingling bitterness with the cup. And the two elements change very fast. The bitter more and more predominates. And by and by the period arrives in which want and fear begin to come in, together with the consciousness which vice carries with it. Vice at the beginning is all bright; and so long as wicked men are prosperous they have no lack of friends; but when trouble comes it begins to be dark, and they become separated one from another, and find themselves without friends. For nothing in this world is so heartless, I was going to say, as men who have had fellowship in vice together. It is not always so. But one of the mysteries of long-continued vice is, that while it wastes

the body, it does mischief the heart ; that it rubs out the finer feelings ; that it not only takes away cordiality and sympathy from men, but leaves them selfish and hard as a stone. The worst mischief of vice is that it leaves men so without a heart.

This was an exceptional case, therefore. The career of this young man was not long enough drawn out to reach the very foundation. He "wasted his substance in riotous living." It was a swirl of intoxication that he was in. For it is said, "When he came to himself," etc. From the time that he left his father's house, clear down to the time when he was feeding swine, a lone exile, he was in a kind of insanity. He had been whirling through scenes of dissipation and debauchery. And now, with more temperate diet, and more select companionship (for I think he changed to advantage when he took the swine for his companions !) he came to himself. Better diet brought coolness to his brain ; and these better companions did not lead him astray. His reason came back to him. And the moment his reason came back, he showed that there was something in him which had not yet been spoiled. He recognized his whole condition. He did not attempt to palliate it. He made no excuses. He heaped no reproaches on his companions, nor upon himself, even. The past was gone. He simply said to himself, "Well, I am worse than my father's slaves and hired servants ; but this one thing I will do : I will go back on my track. I will retrace my steps. I will go home. I will go to my father, and will say to him that I have sinned." There was not one single exculpation. He felt that he had sinned, that heaven had seen his sin, and that God had noted it. And he determined, when he reached home, to say to his father, "I have sinned against heaven, and before thee. I am not worthy to be called thy son." He said to himself, "I will go home, and I will ask to be permitted to sit down with the servants." He had a heart yet which led him to desire to go back to his father's house. And such a heart as that has something recoverable in it. Vice had not washed out all the color. It had not ground all the enamel off. There was something sound at the bottom yet. He had been through a very wicked course, and yet everybody feels that there was, after all, something salvable in that young man's case—that there was softness, tenderness, recuperativeness of heart in him. You will take notice, also, that when he had set his face homeward toward his father's house, with the liturgy that he meant to recite, he was not permitted by that dear old man to get through all the humiliation that he had proposed for himself. For, long before he got in sight of his father's house, his father had got sight of him. Sorrowing love watches more for an outcast than repentance watches for one's own self. The father saw him before he saw the father, and ran to him.

Some might have said, "It is proper that there should be atonement made for offended parental authority ; dignity and government require that the offender should go through a probation ; it is necessary that he should confess." But love did not think so.

"When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

Oh ! how easy it is to confess into the great open heart of love ! and how hard it is to confess in the stern face of justice, of reproach, and of rebuke ! But where there is the glowing heart of sympathy and of love, who could not bury his face in his mother's bosom and say, "Mother ! mother ! I have gone wrong" ! Many a child a tender mother can save, whom a stern father would destroy utterly.

And so, in the representation of the divine mercy here, the word of God stands open like a mother's heart, waiting, nay, anticipating, nay, running after, the delinquent. And when he said, "I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," his father would not let him say, "Make me as one of thy hired servants" ; he cut that all off, and impetuously called for the robe, and the ring, and the shoes. And the boy needed them all, for he was a vagabond. But he had come to all the insignia of enjoyment and triumphant festivity. All were glad ; the old man's heart was *very* glad ; and it went out like a cataract.

And so the young man was rescued. Well, I am glad of it. He was too good to spoil so. There was something good in him. You see that he went by excess of social feeling. He was gentle ; he was generous ; he was affectionate. There was much nobility about him ; and yet it all went wrong. But when, going wrong, experience touched his better qualities, he began to come back again. And everybody is on his side. Everybody goes with the young sinner. And everybody goes against the elder brother just as much. Yet he is the pattern young man. He is the man who is the admiration of the neighborhood. He is the man who thinks his life ought to be written and put in a book. He is the man who is so virtuous that he cannot look out of the window when a wicked man is staggering by. He is the man who prays every day, and thanks God that he is not as other men are. Oh ! he is so strict ! He has never neglected anything, that he knows of. He has kept the whole law. He has been good. He has staid at home, and taken care of his father, and especially of his father's *property*. Well, as he came in from the field where he had been meditating upon his excellence, he heard an uncommon noise in the paternal mansion ; and he called out to one of the servants (for there were a great many of them running hither and thither on strange errands) and said, "Come here—what is all

this?" And the servant said, in his great haste (for he had but time for a hasty reply) "Thy brother is come. This feast is of thy father's making, for joy of his restoration." And the young man was angry. So angry was he that he would not come in.

As near as we can learn, when this younger son went away from his father's house, he went, not only to the great grief of his father, but with the express disapprobation of the elder brother. And, as near as we can learn, the elder brother then dismissed him from all further sympathy, and from all further inquiry. We do not learn, at any rate, that he made any question as to where he had gone, or what had happened to him. But there were tidings of the absent one, because it is declared that he had wasted his substance in riotous living, and with harlots. That is all. The elder brother neither went for him, nor sent for him. Nor did he show any anxiety about his recovery. And when he did come back he was angry. All the natural affections that should have rejoiced seemed to have been deadened in him.

He was a good man, you know—this elder brother. It is not to be supposed that he cheated anybody. He was fair in his bargains. It is not to be supposed that he diverted the revenue, or swore false oaths of any kind. He was a respectable man. He was a moral man. He every day went to the paternal mansion and discharged every duty that was incumbent upon him. He was a proper liver. He restrained inordinate appetites. He was not a drunkard. Neither was he a lascivious man. He was a good man, a respectable man—this elder brother. The only thing that seemed to be wrong about him was that he had not any heart—and that is a good deal for a man to have left out of him. His brother he did not care for. He had been gone; and it did not seem to burden or afflict him. He had taken no pains for his restoration. When he came from the field, on what point did he get angry—this respectable, decorous, exemplary brother, that had staid at home to be virtuous? Why, that *he* had never had such a spontaneous burst of joy over *him* as was manifested over this scapegrace of humanity who had come back, after spending his father's "substance with riotous living."

It would take a miracle to get enthusiastic over such a man as this elder brother. There was not a thing about him to kindle a fire of enthusiasm with. He was hard, he was unsympathizing, he was cold to every one but himself. Faithful? Yes, mechanically faithful. And so are machines. But they are without benevolence, without sympathy, and without self-sacrificing succor for those who are in trouble. He did not pity sin.

Now, any man who only hates sin is of the devil—for the devil hates, though he does not hate sin. Sin is to be pitied ; and no hatred is right that is not mingled with pity. This elder brother did not care for the restoration of the younger brother. “It is his lookout,” was his philosophy. “He must lie down on the bed he has made. He chose his course, and let him follow that course. I chose my course, and you see what it has eventuated in. I trust I may say, without flattery, that virtue in me has brought forth its appropriate reward.” But this younger brother he did not care for. Nay, he was very angry that the father cared for him. The old man was getting weak in his old age, and had brought back this son, and was opening the house, and pouring out the treasure, and calling in the neighbors, and there was the sound of music and dancing in the house—for Christ was not afraid to have folks dance when he made a parable. He made men merry, and made them dance, and life was life, when he was making a picture for the instruction of the times. And the elder brother was angry that the restoration of the younger brother excited such transports of delight, while his cold, stolid selfishness never excited one single flash of enthusiasm—not one.

Well, the parable ends here; but before I go further, I wish to call to your view another touch that is omitted in our observation, too often; and that is, that the old father did not swear at this wayward son, nor thunder indignation at him, as you and I would have been very likely to do. The beauty of the paternal love is kept up all the way through. While the father has been so lenient and forbearing to his dissipated son, and brought him to his heart, in a moment, without probation, in utter faith; so, on the other hand, when the hatefulness of this selfish elder brother was shown, and that right in the gush of the father’s joy, he expostulated with him just as tenderly as a mother with her child, and said to him, “Thou art ever with me. All that I have is thine. Why should I make a special offering. You have everything all the time. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad, for this thy brother. He was dead, and is alive again. He was lost, and is found.” There was no reproach. There was no bitterness. So that even toward this other kind of sin—the sin of sordid selfishness—God is very patient. God is very sorry for the miser. God is very sorry for the proud moralist. God is very sorry for the self-righteous. God is very sorry for hypocrisy. God is very sorry for everything that goes wrong, and that stumbles. God is a father; and if you go wrong by your passions, He is sorry for that. And if you go wrong by your selfishness, He is sorry for that. If you sin with the clenched hands of avarice, He is sorry for that. And He is willing to help anybody, whatever may be the way in which he has gone astray.

He is willing to be gentle, to be lenient toward him." He is willing to be helpful, and to bring him back by the great power of His heart's love.

Dismissing, then, the story, let us see if there are not in it some points of application which we should do well to take heed to. Every one can see that Christ meant us to put the elder brother below the younger. He so constructed this admirable little drama, that everybody, after reading, it would take sides with the young brother against the old brother. The reason is not that the wickedness of the younger brother was venal and slight; because everybody who reads it feels that it was very wicked. Everybody feels the disgracefulness of his career. Our sympathy with him does not touch the wrong-doing at all. Our sympathy is on account of the resiliency, the rebound, that was in him. The point of his recuperableness is where our sympathy comes in. We do not say that he was unblameworthy. We do not say that his vices were mere foibles and faults. We do not say, "Oh, the young will be young; they must sow their wild oats." We do not say anything of the kind. The story is so drawn that everybody feels the exceeding sinfulness of sin in his conduct. And yet when it is finished every one feels, "Bad as he is, I would rather be he than to be the other." And I think the Saviour meant that that should be the feeling. At the bottom the young man had goodness. The top was all bad in him. The elder brother was good at the top, but at the bottom he was all corrupt. In the sight of God, men who are outwardly righteous, who are without sympathy for their fellow-men, who are selfish, who are heartless, who are self-content and self-seeking, are worse, and are more hateful, and are under a more terrible condemnation, than those men whose genial nature has taken them into dissipation. This is a thing not to be said slightly; but if there is any one thing about which we may speak certainly concerning the teaching of Christ, it is that the having a dead heart was the worst wickedness which a man could commit in this world. There is nothing worse than that.

Let us look at one or two other points, and see if this case is exceptional. Look at the parable in the next chapter to this.

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day."

You recollect that scene. It is one of those transcendently felicitous Dantean visions. It is part of the *Inferno* of the New Testament. There was to be a conversation between the saved in the bosom of Abraham in heaven, and one of the lost in hell; and in selecting the man who was to enact the part of the lost, who was selected? A robber? A thief? A traitor to his country? A man high-handed in crime or dissolved in wasting dissipation? No, he selected a rich man,

a man well-placed in the world, a man "clothed in purple and fine linen," who "fared sumptuously every day."

Now, is it a sin to be rich? No, no, certainly it is not a sin to be rich. It is your duty to be rich, if God has armed you with the faculties of wealth making—with the power of amassing property. Well, is it wrong for a man to be "clothed in purple and fine linen"? Why no. A man may be just as proud and just as vain under drab as under purple. It is not what a man has on him, but what a man has in him that determines his pride. There is no wrong in wearing purple, any more than in wearing silk; and wearing silk is not a crime any more than wearing woolen; and wearing woolen is not a crime any more than wearing tow. It is not the dress, but the reason why the dress is worn, that determines the right or the wrong. It is what the dress covers that is to be commended or condemned. This man was rich; but that was not faulty. He was "clothed in purple and fine linen;" but that was not blameworthy. "He fared sumptuously every day;" and if he carried it to the degree of dissipation, and violated the law of love, he did wrong; but if not, he was no worse for that. It is not a sin for a man, if he be able, to spread an abundant table. And a man commits no sin if he be a hearty eater, provided he is active, and keeps within the bounds of digestion. And he commits no sin in eating good things—delicacies and the like—if he gets them honestly, and does not go to excess in eating them. It was the kernel that was meant to be eaten, and not the cob. A man that has the means has the right to spread a generous table. It was not that, then, that was against him.

"There was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table; moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores."

Now look at the exquisite implication. There is not a word said; but you know, as well as I do, that that poor beggar came there, and that the rich man was too big to spend his time looking after beggars. He had seen the loathsome wretch; but he was not enough moved by compassion to send him a morsel. He never sent anything to him. He never took even his off-cast purple and fine linen for the clothing of the beggar. We are left to understand that this well-dressed man, this man that was rich, and was "clothed in purple and fine linen," and that "fared sumptuously every day," used his riches and luxuries just for his own selfish self. That was the trouble. There was the man right before him, groaning; and the dogs were kinder than the rich man. They did play doctor and nurse to the poor fellow's wounds; but the rich man cared not a particle for him. And he went to hell, where he ought to have gone—if anybody ought to go

there. A man whose opportunities, whose education, whose providential mercies, have lifted him into strength and amplitude of means, and who employs the regality of God's bounty—his own reason, his own executive skill, his own genius and accomplishments, all his means and treasures—only to wrap himself round and round and round with the silken, soft web of selfishness—if he be not damnable, none is. And the higher, the brighter, the stronger and the more he is in the sight of men, the worse it is for him; for the greater is the prostitution of his power, and the greater is the perversion of himself. No man can live in God's government with selfishness without being a traitor. There is no virtue, no morality, no respectability, where men's hearts are not controlled by sympathy and by love. The indispensable condition of every element of manhood is, that it should have vital relations to love. If it have not these relations, it is damnable, not for what it is, but for what it misses and lacks.

There is another scene recorded in the twenty-first chapter of Matthew, which is even more pronounced, if it were possible, than this. That you may know exactly to whom he said this, I will read the twenty-third verse:

"When he was come into the temple, the chief priests and elders of the people came unto him as he was teaching, and said, 'By what authority dost thou these things?'"

He goes into a discussion with them; and in that discussion he gives the account, or rather the short parable, of the two sons.

"A certain man had two sons; and he came to the first, and said, 'Son, go and work to-day in my vineyard.' He answered and said, 'I will not'; but afterward he repented, and went. And he came to the second, and said likewise. And he answered and said, 'I go, sir,' and went not. Whether of them twain did the will of his father. They say unto him, 'The first.' Jesus saith unto them, 'Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.'

This Jesus said to the chief priests; to the elders of the people; to the most religious men that there were at that time; to those that were the most eminent and the most respectable; to those that stood highest, and that were exemplars of morality.

"For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and the harlots believed him. And ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him."

What is the point of condemnation here? Not that harlotry is more venial than other immoral courses. Not that a moral man is worse than a dissipated man. It is the question of recoverability. It is the question of the possibility of a man's being cured. And the declaration, of course, is, that a sinner—that is, a publican—knows his deterioration, and knows the wickedness of it. There is a conscience behind his wrong-doing, and that conscience gives him a chance to recover. He recognizes the fact that his heart is wicked, wicked, wicked;

and there may come a time when hope and mercy and divine call shall come to him. And then, in that hour, he will not pretend to be good, he will confess his sins ; and nothing will stand between him and salvation.

But a Pharisee, who has been building himself up by his morality, is so good, so respectable, so observant ; he has so few faults, and so many excellencies, that when the word of God comes to him, he does not believe that he is a sinner. It is harder, therefore, to convict such a man ; and the chances of his coming into the kingdom of God are less, than in the case of the immoral man. He thinks so well of himself that the immoral man, or the harlot, is more likely to go into God's kingdom than he is. The immoral man knows that he sins, and acknowledges it ; the harlot is conscious of being a great sinner, and says of harlotry, "It is a hideous sin ;" so that, after all, they are more accessible to recuperative influences than the moralist who spends most of the time in being proper, and the rest of the time in praising himself for it.

To bring it a little nearer home, there are a great many of you by whom perhaps this discourse is not so much needed ; and yet, there are many of you who do not think it comes home to you, that ought to take it home to yourselves. If there be any person here who, being a member of the church, baptized early, brought up by Christian parents, having received dissuasions from evil, and warnings against evil company, so that he has held himself wholly aloof from the wicked and the over-tempted ; if there be such a person here, who has not only a horror of wickedness, but a horror of wicked men ; if there be a person here whose heart, when bad men are brought to grief, is steeled against sympathy, and who stands in the midst of the tempted and sinning mass of men without anything that makes him feel that he is brother to them, and without any responsive thought in his heart,—he is standing in the place of the elder brother.

There is not a man that lives who is not your brother. There is not a man that carries the load of his own transgression ; there is not a man that is harried through pain and through nerve, who is not joined to you. You are brother to every man, though he is wicked, and though his wickedness has found him out, though perhaps it will not leave him to the very end, and though he may die in his sins. His degradation and sin, though his case may seem hopeless, are no reason why the house of your heart should be shut against him. There should be a heart open to him ; and it should be your heart. Because you are Christian or moral, you should be more considerate of those who are not so. But if you shut your heart, and say, "I live

virtuously, and I therefore am better than these men who live unvirtuously ; and if they will live 'unvirtuously they must take the consequences ; it is none of my business,' beware ; for that is not the spirit of the Master.

There are a great many of you who have an ideal in life. Ideals are very intangible ; but, after all, there are very few things which are so potential in life as an ideal in an energetic nature—the pattern which he sets up before him, and toward which he is forming his whole life. There are a great many whose ideal of life is self-culture and refinement. They are toiling to keep themselves from all coarseness ; and that is right. They strive to keep themselves from all that is degrading ; and that is right. Their ideal of life is, that yet they shall be able to secure a place where no rude wind will come on them, and where they will be shielded from the crashing discords of this world. It is their ideal of life that they will by and by be able to build their crystal dome so high that they shall not hear the groans and sighs and noises that come from the wickedness of men—so high that their hearts will be separated from quick sympathy with the hearts of men that travail in pain.

If God gave you genius ; if God gave you imagination ; if God gave you tender sensibility ; if God gave you love for music, and love for literature, he did not give you these things as so many feathers put into the nest of selfishness, to be pressed by your breast alone. God gave you these royal lights that you might use them, first for yourselves, and then also for others. You are joined to your kind ; and if you are like your Father in heaven, who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust ;" if you have all excellencies, while they are building you up in refinement and virtue, they will at the same time lead you to pity those who are in transgression.

One word more, and only one ; and that is with reference to a danger which merchantmen, who are seeking wealth, are subject to, and ought to be warned against. Beware of taking the power that wealth gives you, to build a house with walls so thick that you cannot hear the sounds of men who sigh in the street. Beware that you do not build your banqueting-hall so that you cannot see the beggar full of sores that lies at your door. Beware of using your virtue and your prosperity as means of separating yourselves from that great sinning, suffering mass of mankind to which Christ came, and to which he sends you, that, in your place, imitating him, you may be according to the measure of your strength a saviour, as he was.

There is nothing that you may not have. Build yourselves up in

all morality, and in all excellence, and in all refinement, and in all art, and in all beauty, and in the power of wealth, and, if need be, in all publicity. These are always right when you have a heart of love to vivify them, and direct them, and control them. But when they change the heart, and leave you an idol of selfishness, woe to you! The publicans and the harlots shall go into the kingdom of God before such a man.

Beware of refined selfishness. Beware of aesthetic selfishness. Beware of aristocratic selfishness. Beware of the selfishness of prosperity and of respectability. Beware of the temptation of the devil. Beware of anything that shall make you indifferent to the sufferings and to the condition of those who are cast down by reason of their sins—for you, in your estate, are sinners, dependent, every hour and every moment, on the goodness of a pitying God. Be you to your fellows what God is to you.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON

Grant unto us, our Heavenly Father, that same blessed invitation that hath so often brought us to thee, and so often made the way familiar and easy to be trodden. For it is not our outward want alone that can bring us to thee. We turn everywhere, and seek succor in everything until we have learned how blessed it is to seek our good of thee. And then, the memories of past mercies; then the sense of thy great goodness and condescension, and the beauty of thy face, revealed to us in times past, awaken in us earnest desires. Our souls long for thee more than all else; for thou only canst fill the solitary hour, and thou only canst cheer the despondency which comes to all; and thou only canst bring peace to the heart disturbed by pride and selfishness; and thou art the only physician of the soul; and all other things are but poor; all other things but disguise and do not cure. It is thy soul that cures our soul. It is thy love that teaches us to love. It is thy goodness that begets goodness in us. Be pleased then, O our Father! to call us by our names, that we may know that we are remembered of thee, and are sought out of thee and are borne in everlasting remembrance.

We thank thee that thou hast made known to us thy paternity. And though we do not understand it, and, with the little light of our own experience, cannot follow thee as Father of the wide scope of universal government, nor solve all the strange things that come to pass beneath thy wide extended sway, yet we are content. We leave to the future these insoluble mysteries. We trust in thy love. We trust in thy justice, and in thy truth. We believe that thou wilt not forsake any that put their trust in thee; and that whatever things are dark now, shall be cleared by and by. Thou art saying to us, "What I do now ye know not; but ye shall know hereafter;" and to that hereafter we remit all our care, all our anxiety and outreaching questions, and trust thee. Even as children trust their parents long before they can understand them, and trust in simplicity, trust unquestioning, and unreasoning, so we desire to abide in thee. Thou art good; and thou doest good; and Love is thy name; our hearts go up unto thee; and in thy name will we trust.

Be pleased, in thine infinite mercy, to forgive all our past sinfulness, and to cleanse our hearts from all things that are offensive to thee, and make us lovely altogether in thy sight. And we pray that thou wilt help us, and that we may not be discouraged as we find difficulties and obstacles in our way. May we still press forward, and to the end may we walk along the straight and narrow way, that finally we may be saved.

We pray that thou wilt grant thy blessing to rest, to-night, upon all that are gathered together. If there be darkness without, may it be calm and light within. And grant that here in thy sanctuary we may find a home: grant that here we may find our brethren, and rejoice with them. We pray that thou wilt prepare us by the labor and by the enjoyment, and by the instruction of the Sabbath day, for the toil of the campaigning week. May we go forth to our avocations, to our care, and to our responsibility with the presence of the Lord forevermore overshadowing us. May we not forget the lessons of the sanctuary. May we find them every hour a shield, or a weapon of offence against wickedness. May we be strengthened. May our faith not fail us in all the darkness of the way. May there still be the light of thy truth that shall guide us. And we pray that thou wilt prepare us, by the thousand experiences of thy providence—by good and evil that are coming upon us; by pain, and by fears, and by disappointments, and by expectations fulfilled, and by all the blessings of hope and love, and by the medicine of sorrow and trouble—to be men in Christ Jesus. Prepare us to be worthy of our name *sons of God*. Prepare us for dying; through death lead us gently into that life which shall know no dying. And there, in thy presence, we will give the praise of our salvation to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Heavenly Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt add thy blessing to the word of exhortation and instruction. May we take heed to our ways. May we remember that to love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbor as ourself is the law; and may we feel that in breaking this, the law of the realm is broken. May we be afraid of all sin. May we be afraid of heartless selfishness. Let us not be separated from our kind. And by as much as we are lifted above them, may we use the space to draw them up to us again. And so in every advance, may we bring some with us. Grant that we may more and more interpret thy nature, and understand more and more what is the sacrifice of Christ. And bring us, at last, through our earthly experiences, purified, glorified, into the heavenly kingdom, where we will praise the Father, the Son and the Spirit. *Amen.*

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